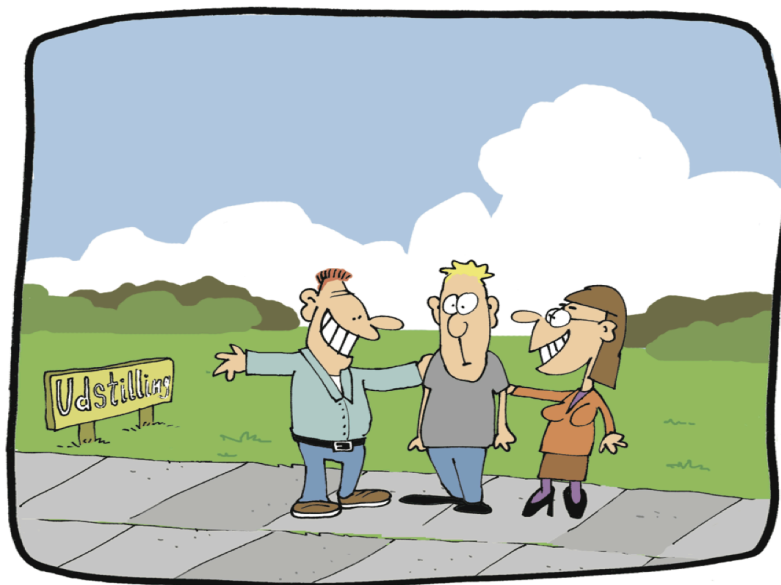


## Peter Christensen Teilmann

### Changes with consolidation – and vice versa

The role of theatre museums in the development of Europe (and the EU)



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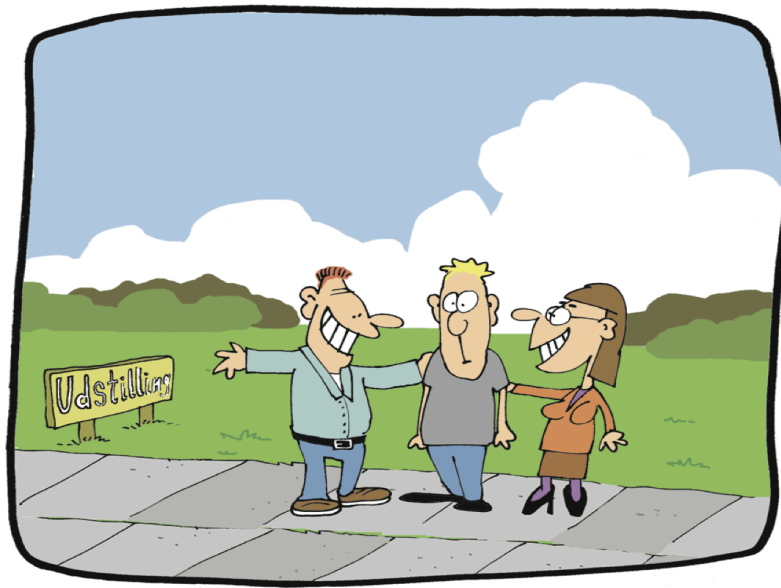
[webtekst21](#) er et redigeret key-note-foredrag fra konferencen European Route of Historic Theatres, afholdt i Wien i april 2013. Foredraget reflekterer og giver perspektiver på aktuelle udfordringer for teatermuseer og teaterhistoriske bygninger rundt om i Europa. For teatermuseer og teaterhistoriske bygninger som fx Teatermuseet i Hofteatret er bygningen og de fysiske og fredede interiører ofte både museets vigtige 'genstand' og største barriere. Så spørgsmålet er: Hvordan kan man som moderne teatermuseum – i skarp konkurrence med andre museer og kulturinstitutioner – forny formidlingen af både den materielle og immaterielle kulturarv, som museet og dets bygning er et både traditionsrigt og levende udtryk for?

## Changes with consolidation – and vice versa

### The role of theatre museums

### in the development of Europe (and the EU)

Appendix: Questions & answers following the lecture



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### Peter Christensen Teilmann

President, Association of Historic Theatres in Europe 2013-  
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Former Danish representative in the Cultural Programmes, EU 2007-2011  
Former chairman, The Culture and Art Programme, The Nordic Council 2010-2012

# Changes with consolidation – and vice versa

## The role of theatre museums in the development of Europe (and the EU)

By Peter Christensen Teilmann

### Content

#### 1. What to be said by whom and from which point of view

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- *institutions and buildings*
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- *European culture at a local/national theatre museum*
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- *less is more: fewer objects > more stories > more users (Fine Art museums)*

#### 3. What to be said for whom and how and why

#### 1. What to be said by whom and from which point of view

Why the title “changes with consolidation – and vice versa”? It is because we are dealing with historical theatre buildings and theatre museums. Because, in both respects, we are dealing with cultural heritage and cultural development. The building, whether it is a historical or modern building, is the biggest barrier and in particular when speaking of museums in a historical framework and interiors, also our most important object. A historic (theatre)building is in itself of course material cultural heritage, but includes in fact also a sort of immaterial or Intangible cultural heritage. Often we are anchored in a physical foundation the meaning of which we must be prepared to change at the same time.

In a few points I shall discuss some of the fundamental challenges which are facing the Theatre Museum these years that is as a special museum and as a type of cultural institution among many others. In order to do so it is necessary to ignore the national and institutional differences between the individual theatre museums; probably they are often the ones which are fundamental to the options of the individual museums. That is the challenge we feel in our work when drafting the travelling exhibition *the history of Europe – told by its theatres*.

Along the way I shall mention the traveling exhibition and the European context, not just the exhibition, but the whole organization behind it, in which our entire joint Perspective is rooted.

It is necessary for me to highlight the point of view from which I am speaking in general. Admittedly, I speak as a member of Perspective and as director of the Theatre Museum at the Court Theatre in Copenhagen – that is as a person representing an institution.

However, I speak on the basis of two additional issues.

Firstly, as former Danish representative at the Cultural Programme in the EU 2007-2011 and as former chairman of the Culture and Arts Program in the Nordic Council 2010-2012 – that is as provider of funding who has to relate to the political values and culture ideological criteria that characterize these programmes; they are often formulated across types of institutions (i.e. museums and all other types of cultural institutions) and often they result in requirements which challenge the institutional framework and organizational routines, with which the applicants are familiar.

Secondly, I speak on the basis of my experience as a professional player in the cultural life over fifteen years – and mind you outside the institutions, i.e. without being permanently employed by a culture institution, but in cooperation with them as project manager. So much about what to be said by whom and from which point of view. – Now to the point!

## **2. InsideOut – OutsideIn:**

- *institutions and buildings*
- *collections and exhibitions*
- *specialist museum and cultural institution*
- *cultural heritage and cultural development*
- *European culture at a local/national theatre museum*
- *public space and audience development ('non-audience', 'non-attenders')*
- *less is more: fewer objects > more stories > more users (Fine Art museums)*

A challenge in the self-understanding of the Theatre Museum and dissemination practices is to show the architecture and the importance of the buildings apart from being architecture and building; not just the meanings of the actual buildings and reason to be in the time and in the society, in which they occurred. But also the

institutional and architectural environments of which these buildings are an expression, not just locally and nationally, but exactly as part of the international e.g. European trends.

A different, but equivalent challenge in the self-understanding of the Theatre Museum and dissemination practices is to show the importance of the collections apart from being collections. The exhibitions of a specialist museum should always be based on collections of archive material and on objects – which is our principal argument on all levels that is if we wish to remain specialist museums.

Both in theory and in practice there are examples of theatre museological activities, based exclusively on objects and material outside the collections. I shall not embark on this hyper current and critical discussion about the object and its true meaning – the real stuff, authenticity and originality. There are many theoretical and practical studies reflected in the topic. For example I can refer to Elaine Heumann Gurian's essay "What is the Object of This Exercise? A Meandering Exploration of the Many Meanings of Objects in Museums" of the anthology *Reinventing the Museum* (2004).

I will, however, on behalf of all museums maintain: Always based on collections, but never only on collections. There should be something more. Not just different knowledge and text intermediary cultural and historical context, but also new forms of dissemination and communication.

One format is as we are now doing it in the Perspectiv-organized travelling exhibition *The history of Europe – told by its theatres*: creating exhibitions to include the national collections of several theatre museums. In the initial phase, where we are right now, we seek to open the interaction between the collections of the individual museums by organizing the main theme *The history of Europe – told by its theatres* in eight topics – including: Religious Impact, Changing Society – Changing Building, Building the Nation/Preserving the Nation, Crossing Borders, Democracy.

Thus InsideOut: A joint travelling exhibition focusing on concrete theatre (historical) buildings and institutions at different times; setting out their impact on the cultural and social development locally, nationally and transnationally (see Outline for the exhibition (DRAFT, September 2012): "The focus of the exhibition is on the theatre building – why it is there, by whom and for whom it was built, how society is reflected in the architecture, how interaction between audience and stage is organized by way of architecture, how the stage relates to the auditorium etc." Furthermore we will look into the historical and still ongoing interaction between the artistic, institutional and political culture as presented in and by the building.

Another format is to create exhibitions which include not only the specialist museum's own collections, but also objects and materials which have come from a completely different context; they could be of a cultural nature, but also different things altogether.

The ultimate, but really obvious thing if you take user involvement and audience development seriously, would be to let the audience even contribute material for the exhibition, not just in advance during the preparation of the exhibition, but continuously during the exhibition period.

This involves large institutional and organizational challenges. But economically and technologically it is possible – and this is the way forward, this is the unique condition of possibility, which is peculiar to the specialist museums for strengthening their institutional rooting and also changing their impact on the world around them. This possibility is closely related to another development in the museum world, which generally applies to cultural institutions: namely, a much stronger focus on involving the public space in the development of a new form of audience culture.

There is an example of this in Copenhagen at present where linked to the construction of a new underground metro the so-called “Wall” has been set up. On this “Wall” the demographic and social cultural history of Copenhagen is told from the digitalized collections and archives of the Museum of Copenhagen; it is possible for the user simultaneously to upload his/her own pictures and other digital material, inspired by the institutionally rooted stories which the “Wall” narrates.

Involvement of public spaces often means that the exhibitions come closer to the everyday lives of the audience and that it reaches people in more everyday environments. However, the use of the public spaces could also just be another way to communicate topics, which of course is nothing much to do with the everyday and present of the audience, but it may open for attracting “people with a different socio-demographic profile to the current audience, including non-audiences, those with no previous contact with the arts” – or the cultural institution as e.g. museums.

This focus not on the impact of the exhibition with outcome has to do with the enhanced efforts also on a European level aimed at creating contact to non-visitors or non-audiences. I shall revert to this. First and last the inclusion of public spaces is a crucial step towards detaching the museum from its buildings, because the museum – and also the theatre – to many still “appears as a closed, sacred and exclusive world”, as Marc Maure says it in the article “The Exhibition of Theatre – on the Staging of Museum Objects” (in *Nordic Museology* No 2, 1995). – Quite an interesting point of view just when it is about an exhibition about theatre buildings in theatre museums.

And this brings me back to the object-oriented exhibition practice. If we must insist that it is the objects which are the central cornerstone of a museum exhibition, but at the same time we would like to create awareness and make contact with new audience groups – well then in my view we could learn something from some of the foremost Fine Art Museums.

Here, several of them have started to cut to the bone and exhibit a few works, in some cases just a single work, but then tell more and more different stories about it and do it by means other than the classical authoritative intermediate text of knowledge.

The Speed Art Museum in Louisville, Kentucky is a magnificent example. For example they have had an exhibition with one work, namely Caravaggio's *The Fortune Teller* (1595). In this case the object or the work in itself is to such a degree charged with meaning that it alone draws attention. Otherwise it may be in the communication of that particular object. At the Theatre Museum in Copenhagen we are working to create a fixed format for the exhibition of a single object as the display of one object at a time under the title: Trash and Treasure.

Not only is this good money economy, but also relevant experience economy. In any case it is a thought we would do well to develop in our context.

### **3. What to be said for whom and how and why**

The title is still “Changes with consolidation – and vice versa”. I have tried to outline a superior paradox for the theatre history museums, namely:

The building, whether it is a historical or a modern one, is the main obstacle of the theatre museum and especially if we are speaking of museums in a historical setting and interiors, while it is our main object. We are often rooted in a physical foundation, the meaning of which we must be prepared to change.

If the architecture, the building, the interior is one of our challenges then the very art form, the theatre, which we wish to show at the museum, is the other important challenge. The professional issues surrounding originality, indirect representation, mediation, etc. by which every museum is constantly challenged, are no less with an art form that is as volatile as theatre is, and a theatre which in our time is anything but the obvious place for new generations to go to.

If we wish to ensure the continued anchoring of the theatre museums in the local, regional as well as the European present and future we must focus on a few constitutional things and I would suggest the following:

Firstly, we should be prepared to change our own position or dealing with the institutional framework and the organizational routines with which we are familiar and perhaps would prefer to continue to exist under.

Secondly, we should keep up with future technological and aesthetic experience, but also with the development of the aesthetic experience. Exactly with the theatre as art form and as cultural expression we have a local and European context, that is – across language boundaries – a unique option to renew the museum’s activities, dissemination and communication.

I repeat: Exactly with the theatre as art form and as cultural expression we have local and an European context, that is – across language boundaries – a unique option to renew the museum’s activities, dissemination and communication. You could say that fine art museums often have a European or simply just an international collection from the start and, therefore, are never challenged in their existence. That is of course to a certain extent correct.

But I also would like to say that if you are a specialist museum based on an art like theatre which is often rooted in local conditions incl. the national languages – then we must just lift ourselves above these roots by using the more sensory-oriented and non-verbal means of communication and dissemination.

This is our challenge and what may make us relevant in one such trans-national and European context.

It could happen in several ways, however, allow me to point to a few:

If you have a theatre museum in a theatre building you are lucky (and that you are no longer in most places). First of all, as I mentioned in the beginning, a historic theatre building is in itself – with its historical framework and interiors – of course material cultural heritage, but it includes in fact also a sort of immaterial or *Intangible* cultural heritage – UNESCO has focused on the for many years now. Furthermore, when you have a theatre museum in a theatre building, then you could make a “living museum” as you know it from Open Air museums and others: actors working on stage. Occasionally we do it in Copenhagen and it is a great experience for visitors, but sometimes also a challenge for the actors, when they are rehearsing a real play for an actual performance.

If you acknowledge the fact that with the theatre as an art form the theatre museum, regardless of the amount of original objects and all things being equal,



would only be in a position to present and represent the art form indirect. This opens a number of mediating communication grips or opportunities for remediation.

It opens for a more *sensory-oriented* communication grip, where original objects with advantage can be represented in other formats or remediated; and where historical material – whether it is original objects or not – can be subjected to more sensory-oriented orchestrations e.g. via sound collages (at the Theatre Museum at the Court theatre we actually have an example of a sound collage, which through only sounds “tells” the story of the last evening at the Court Theatre of Struensee, physician to the Danish king, and his subsequent execution by beheading).

In short I believe we need to develop the dissemination and communication of our collections and exhibitions, if we are to observe the focus on audience development in Europe and the EU, talking about cultural institutions and organisations in general.

The conclusions from a conference under the European Commission in October last year (2012): *European Audiences: 2020 and beyond*<sup>1</sup>, notice the importance of the integration of “cultural, economic and social dimensions” in all types of institutionalized cultural activities and tell about several important dimensions in relation to target groups, e.g.

- 1) developing or increasing new audiences,
- 2) deepening relationships with existing audiences and not least:
- 3) diversifying audiences, that is “attracting people with a different socio-demographic profile to the current audience, including non-audiences, those with no previous contact with the arts” – or the cultural institutions as e.g. museums

If we wish to be museums for new generations in ten years we must dare to be cultural experience destinations in line with other types of cultural institutions, that in general has as a focus on awareness making for different types of audiences as a guiding principle in the planning of a given exhibition or task of dissemination – in line with the classical principle that the exhibition depends on what is in the archives.

The important requirement for audience development is the development of the institutional and organizational routines in which we function. We need to have a closer connection between what we do for ourselves and what is the outcome for the audience.

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<sup>1</sup> <http://ec.europa.eu/culture/news/documents/conclusions-conference.pdf>

And each time we meet across national and institutional borders as we do here, we should be doing something to move in that direction. We should never forget that changes should be based on consolidation, but also that consolidation needs changes. To strengthening the traditional museum and the historic building as historic building and as part of the European material as well as immaterial or Intangible cultural heritage, we must reinvent it as such: not only *what* it is, but also *why* and for *whom*.

*See discussion >*

### European Route of Historic Theatres, Conference 2013 in Vienna

#### APPENDIX

### Questions & answers following the lecture by Peter C. Teilmann

**Carsten Jung (moderator):** You followed the example of the other speakers, presenting quite a lot in a short time, and you did this in an abbreviated form you had warned us about before. So everybody can make their pick now and we shall develop these highlights as we go along. To start with, you pointed out that the museum is an object itself, and at the same time it is an obstacle. It strikes me that this is also true for historic theatres: a historic theatre is an object itself, particularly when we put it on the European Route of Historic Theatres, but for the theatre practitioner who wants to create a performance in it, it is an obstacle because you can't do all the things in a historic theatre which you can do in a modern theatre. So we find the same object – obstacle relation here that you defined for museums. Another point you underlined repeatedly during your lecture was: “Open up! Open up! Open up!”

As an example you encouraged museums to let the audience add to the activities of the museums, to let them add their items to the exhibitions, add non-specialist material. Secondly, let the museum extend into the public spaces, do not stay in your museum or your theatre but go where the people are and perform there. And thirdly, open up the organization. All this ties in with the idea of continuous development we have been talking

about all morning. I am not sure what to make of the “open up” idea yet, but thank you for pressing this point.

**Peter C. Teilmann:** Open up is *inside – out*, but it is also *outside – in*. For me it is not just less museum and more public spaces, it works both ways. For example, in Copenhagen I give guided tours of Slotsholmen, the island that includes the Parliament. Groups are taken on the tour and learn about history: politics, military history and the development of society in general in connection to the theatre culture. And then we end up in the Theatre Museum, which is also on Slotsholmen, and enjoy a traditional exhibition based on items, pictures and posters. So that is *outside – in*. If we only went *inside – out*, we would lose our *raison d’être* as a specialist museum.

**Franklin Hildy, University of Maryland, USA:** To what extent have you explored making items available on the Internet as a way of encouraging people to come to the museum? Also, has an app been created that helps people to look up your museum, the opening hours, what you are doing, and encourage them to come on the spur of the moment? Because there are many people who visit sights in an improvised way...

**Teilmann:** In principle, what you do on the Internet has value in itself, but on the other hand, the goal is to inspire people to visit the museum. It is not enough to present the objects of the museum (exhibits as well as objects from the archives) on the Internet in a digitized form. Only when we enrich it with additional material it becomes interesting for a wider public. A school class in another part of the country will use it, and when they come to Copenhagen the following year on excursion, they will want to see the museum. The same applies to apps and other media. But it costs a lot of money. There are large museums that do it already and on a high level. But many small museums and small theatres cannot do it, even when they want to.

**Jung:** I would like to hear a statement from Almagro, please, because there is the oldest theatre in Spain, the Corral de Comedias, and it is used as living theatre museum; and across the public square there is the National Theatre Museum; and you have thousands of tourists coming to visit the theatre every year. How do you do that?

**Genaro Galàn Garcia, Almagro, Spain:** People come to Almagro from everywhere because of the historic theatre. The Internet is the main source of information for them. We do not spend much on publicity. Some publicity just happens, for free; for example, two weeks ago, we

received a visit by the Prince of Spain and his family. The main vehicle to promote Almagro is the annual International Festival of Classical Theatre, now in its 36th year. The Ministry of Culture is involved in it, and we present the programme in Madrid, using all means of communication. The festival makes us known not only in Spain, but throughout Europe. And because of this, visitors come all year round. We have 9000 inhabitants in the city of Almagro, but many more visitors every year. About 70% come from Spain, and they come because the Corral de Comedias has attained a position of a national heritage that everybody who is interested in Spanish history and culture must have seen.

**Jung:** It seems to me that there are two important points in your communication that we can learn from: there is the Festival, which puts Almagro and its theatre on the map and into the minds of many people as a place that exists and that it has an important theatre building; but you also communicate that this theatre can be visited all year round, outside the festival. As a result, you do not only get a festival audience for a couple of weeks, you also get tourists in all other weeks of the year.

**Galàn Garcia:** Throughout the year, we also have small classical performances in the theatre week after week, day after day. So even outside the festival, the visitor is offered a real classical theatre experience – a short one, since the performance lasts only about 30 minutes. This is the living museum aspect of our activities.

**Warnock Kerr, Richmond, UK:** Thank you, Carsten, for bringing this up again, and thank you, Genaro, for explaining the example of Almagro which will be very useful to the Georgian Theatre Royal in Richmond. It sounds as if I should spend a little more time in London, promoting my theatre. And I would be very interested in speaking to Peter Teilmann about the concept of taking the museum out into the community and into the environment, e.g. in our market square. How did you go about formulating the exhibition on the digital wall in Copenhagen?

**Teilmann:** It was not conceived by us, but by the Copenhagen Museum, the local history museum. They cooperated with the company that was supposed to build the new metro below the square; the metro construction created a lot of problems for the people living in the area, so you could say that on the part of the company sponsoring the digital wall was an attempt to sugar over the problems. That is how you can be used as a museum ... There is a lot

of money to it and it is to 'pour oil on troubled waters', but never the less it has a positive outcome.

**Per Forsström, Stockholm, Sweden:** Let me tell you about the experience of Drottningholm. "Drottningholm Theatre Museum Foundation" was the name of the organization that took care of the palace theatre in the 1920s. The palace theatre started as a museum; later, in the 1940s, performances were added. Since the 1950s, there was an ongoing conflict between the museum side and the performance side, based on their different perspectives. A museum with archives and collections works for eternity; whereas the performing arts work for the next premiere, and that is the end of their horizon. This, in the end, led to the museum being moved away from Drottningholm; so it is not there anymore, it is now combined with the Music Museum in Stockholm.

Secondly, just a comment on Carsten's initial remark, when you mentioned the "obstacles" of performing in a historic theatre. It depends on what starting point you have for a production. If the stage director thinks he can do anything in a historic theatre that he can do in a modern theatre, then he will meet obstacles. But on the other hand, in a historic theatre you can do things that you could never do in a modern theatre, and that is something to remember.

**Jung:** I totally agree. I was thinking of the average stage director working in a historic theatre for the first time and trying to do everything his usual way and against the building instead of making use of the opportunities and respecting the historic environment.

**Teilmann:** In Copenhagen, the theatre museum was very close to being removed from the court theatre. The idea appeared that the museum could be anywhere; it could be housed probably even better in a different building, *since the theatre is not really an exhibition space*. But we were lucky to have the politicians on our side, and the museum stayed where it was – *now even with the theatre, the Court Theatre itself, as our primary 'object'*.

Nevertheless, the conflict reappears daily. The museum staff prepares an exhibition and at the same time actors prepare for their premiere three days later – and presto, there is a big crash. So every now and again, I run out of my office to separate the actors from the museum people. Fortunately, I have my office in the backstage area, so I can easily do that.

Allow me one more comment. We have to do with theatre as an *art form*. And our fundamental problem is therefore: *indirect representation of the art*. All culture history museums have this problem (not the fine art museums), but in a theatre museum, it sort of

doubles. What if we had the same perspective on the audience? Then we could do things in our theatre museum that have nothing to do with either the theatre or the museum. For example: TV shows. A TV show brings an audience to our place (and, by the way, money from the TV channel as well); and those people, the live audience of the TV show, they go home and say to their children: "You should go to this museum together with grandpa and grandma!" And the next weekend, they'll be there. How did you learn about the museum, we ask them. Answer: "Because my father and mother were here for a TV show." Therefore, *indirect representation of the audience* is also a way to work.

You could also add: If you want development of the audience, first of all you need to develop the institution.